



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO BISHOPS OF TANZANIA ON THEIR "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" VISIT

Tuesday, 20 February 1996

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. It gives me great joy to welcome you, the *Bishops of the Church in Tanzania* on your *ad Limina* visit, which manifests and strengthens the bonds of *fraternal hierarchical communion* which unite each of you with the Successor of Peter. With you, you bring the hopes and joys, the burdens and sorrows of all your people. May your prayer at the tombs of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, whose martyrdom sealed this See as the centre of the universal *koinonia*, renew your zeal in caring for the flock entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit,(1) in order that the priests, Religious and lay faithful of Tanzania may increasingly grow "into a holy temple in the Lord".(2)

Building on the foundation of the witness and sacrifice of the missionaries who brought the Gospel to you more than a century ago, the Family of God in Tanzania, in union with the rest of the Church, is preparing to cross the threshold of the new millennium with renewed commitment to the cause of the Gospel. The "new Advent"—the years of final preparation for the Great Jubilee—is a time for God's People *to radiate all the freshness, enthusiasm and courage* which mark the lives of those who have "put on the Lord Jesus Christ".(3) The *vocation to holiness of life*—to the "eternal life" of communion with Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is the supreme duty at this time of grace, a duty incumbent on all the Church's members, and first and foremost *upon Bishops*, who shepherd God's People as living instruments of the Eternal High Priest. As we travel the path of conversion and renewal we are to be "examples to the flock":(4) "in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity".(5) We can give no more convincing testimony to the saving truth of the Gospel than the witness of holiness in our own lives. 2. The Bishop is the Bridegroom of his Church and must faithfully tend her as did his Master. I urge you to love, as a father and elder brother, all those whom God has placed in your care: priests, deacons, men and women religious, catechists, families, every individual. By clear preaching and reverent celebration of the Sacraments, inspire them with "a true longing for holiness, a deep desire for conversion and personal renewal".(6) Every member of the community needs to be formed "according to the mind of Christ".(7) We cannot

overstate the importance of *comprehensive programmes of catechesis* for all groups in your Dioceses: *children, young people and adults*. The goal of these efforts must be a thorough Christian formation, embracing human maturity, doctrinal soundness and spiritual growth. Two valuable resources will assist you in fostering "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord"(8): the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, now translated into Kiswahili, and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation " *Ecclesia in Africa*", which charts the course for the Church's evangelizing mission for the Third Christian Millennium.

3. In the light of our meetings together, I warmly encourage the pastoral attention which you are devoting to *catechists, youth and families*. I join you in praising the Father of mercies that the dedicated work of *catechists* is bearing such good results in your Churches. These generous men and women are "*irreplaceable evangelizers*" and the basic strength of your Christian communities.(9) You must continue to ensure that catechists will be "equipped for every good work"(10)—suitably prepared to meet the challenges posed by the empty promises and erroneous teachings of certain sects which are spreading confusion among your people. This you are already doing by providing opportunities for planned and systematic training through special programmes for catechists, as well as through days of prayer and courses of renewal.(11)

Continue to help *young Tanzanians to respond generously to the ideals of the Gospel*. All over the world I have seen young people waiting for the Church to harness their joyful enthusiasm by challenging them without compromise to be worthy of the noble tasks to which Christ calls them. Your ministry to youth, which "must clearly be part of the overall pastoral plan of Dioceses and parishes",(12) should prepare young Tanzanians to place their gifts at the service of the Church by becoming *evangelizers of their peers* and by assuming their rightful place in parish and diocesan life.

4. Another priority of your ministry is the promotion of the holiness and stability of the *family*, as you help Christian married couples to build their lives on the solid basis of the sacramental grace which makes *marriage and family life the normal path of holiness* for the majority of the faithful. Tanzanian families must be helped to preserve their noble values and traditions, especially their characteristic spirit of sharing and hospitality. Effective pastoral care of the family includes the provision of adequate *marriage preparation*. This must clearly and convincingly present the Church's teaching on the unity and indissolubility of the marriage bond, as well as her teaching on responsible procreation and the use of natural methods of regulating fertility.(13) The aim of your initiatives must be to help the families in your Dioceses to fulfil their vocation to be the first schools of discipleship and of evangelization, where parents are the first catechists of their children and where all members share in the mission to "guard, reveal and communicate love".(14)

5. All catechesis should include *sound formation in the Church's social doctrine*, a formation which will enable the laity to fulfil their specific mission of bringing "to bear upon the social fabric an influence aimed at changing not only ways of thinking but also the very structures of society, so that they will better reflect God's plan for the human family".(15) With the help of well trained lay men and women, you must continue to address the vital ethical and moral questions affecting your people's development: honesty in public life, justice in economic matters, the crushing burden of poverty, the safeguarding of human rights, and all that undermines the dignity of conjugal love. *Listen to the*

anguished cry of the poor, and instil in your communities a deep "hunger and thirst for righteousness".(16) Each local Church "must be an energetic witness to justice and peace in her structures and in the relationships among her members".(17)

Effective Christian witness must also include co-operation and dialogue with other religious traditions. Ecumenical and interreligious activities should therefore be encouraged so that mutual understanding and respect may give rise to a common effort among all people of goodwill to work for human progress and development at every level of society. The poorest of the poor among you are the more than *seven hundred thousand refugees from Rwanda and Burundi*. I ask you to continue to show them compassion and generosity, with a profound spirit of self-sacrifice which does not hesitate in the face of your limited possibilities. Please God, conditions of peace and security will return to those troubled countries, thus permitting the return of the refugees to their homes and lands. I am fully aware of the seriousness of their situation, and I have not failed to appeal to the international community on their behalf. While we are thankful for the assistance being provided, we are all saddened to see that the best efforts of agencies and volunteers cannot cope with the urgent needs of so many people. We are especially disappointed to note that those responsible for the continuing violence seem to ignore the voice of right and justice. In spite of the difficulties involved, I ask you to be sensitive to the needs of these brothers and sisters, and I make a special appeal for the Dioceses of Rulenge and Kigoma, whose human and material resources are severely taxed by efforts to assist the refugees. In the Church's name I thank you for what you have done so far.

6. Dear Brothers: with your effective guidance the *Institutes of consecrated men and women in your Dioceses*, especially those of more recent foundation, must be helped to foster an unflinching commitment to holiness and a renewed dedication to the apostolate. Only if Religious deepen their personal friendship with God and bear practical witness to a fraternal life in community—in which the members are "servants of one another"(18)—they be able to share with the local Church that gift of grace which is represented by each Institute's charism. The consecrated life in Tanzania will continue to give "splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the Beatitudes", (19) as long as men and women Religious avoid the pitfalls of a secularized style of living and, instead, *inspire in the Christian community a yearning for conversion and perfection*, a love of prayer, both personal and liturgical, and a firm commitment to solidarity with others, especially the poor. Well-rounded *programmes of continuing formation* are essential if Religious are to be effective agents of an evangelization based on "a new 'ardour for holiness'".(20) Bishops, as those primarily responsible for the Churches life, and with due respect for the legitimate internal autonomy of religious communities, should help to ensure that candidates are carefully selected, and that they receive an *initial formation* which prepares them for the total consecration of themselves to God and their specific mission in the Church.

7. How can we fail to mention *the dedicated ministry of the vast majority of your priests*, who truly live and work as authentic "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God"?(21) In our meetings you have mentioned the deep joy you experience at seeing the presbyterate flourish with the addition of new members. That joy must of course be accompanied by necessary discernment, as the Apostle Paul warns: "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands".(22) It remains the Bishop's personal responsibility to see to it that *seminarians are formed in the likeness of Christ*, the Spouse and Head of the Church. Thus, "the Bishop should make a point of visiting them often and in some way 'being' with them, as a way of giving significant expression to his responsibility for the formation of candidates for the priesthood".(23) I likewise urge you to exercise great care in the choice of the staff of your seminaries. All those responsible for formation should be of proven human and spiritual maturity and dedication. As you know, *authentic priestly spirituality* involves the development of attitudes, habits and practices that will continue after Ordination, and this must be the goal which you set for all formation programmes. Such

programmes, sustained by the power and wisdom of Christ Crucified,(24) must be based upon fervent prayer, firm discipline, willing obedience, generous service of others, a missionary attitude and celibate chastity. With respect to this last point, the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops recalled that seminarians "should acquire affective maturity and should be both clear in their minds and deeply convinced that for the priest celibacy is inseparable from chastity".(25) *Celibacy is a journey of absolute trust in God*, which enables priests to serve Christ and his Church with an undivided heart;(26) it is a call to radical discipleship.⁸ At every stage of their lives, your priests count on you for clear-sighted pastoral leadership and fraternal concern. Bishops should encourage their priests to be models of *simple living*. They should be particularly *close to those priests who may be faltering in fidelity* to their vocation, and they must not tire of insisting that the *ministerial priesthood is not a profession or a means of social advancement. It is a sacred ministry*, the interior configuration of a man who is thus empowered to act *in persona Christi*. Obedience to the Gospel demands that Bishops should deal promptly, frankly and resolutely with any situation that scandalizes the flock or weakens the credibility of the Church's witness. Following the example of Christ the Good Shepherd,(27) they must *seek out* those in difficulty and gently "admonish them as their beloved children".(28) Above all, Bishops must *pray without ceasing* for their priests, that the gift of God that is within them through the laying on of hands(29) may be constantly rekindled.⁹ Beloved Brothers in Christ: as the day draws near when she will cross the threshold of the new millennium, the Church turns her gaze to the Lord in whose hands lie the history and destiny of all peoples and nations. This is a time to be "renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness".(30) May Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, assist you as you lead God's people in Tanzania to this saving encounter. With my Apostolic Blessing.

(1) Cfr. *Act.* 20, 28.

(2) *Eph.* 2, 21.

(3) *Rom.* 13, 14.

(4) *1Petr.* 5, 3.

(5) *1Tim.* 4, 12.

(6) IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 42.

(7) Cfr. *Gal.* 2, 5.

(8) Cfr. *Phil.* 8.

(9) Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Redemptoris Missio*, 73.

(10) *2Tim.* 3, 17.

(11) Cfr. CONGREGATIONIS PRO GENTIUM EVANGELIZATIONE *Guide for Catechists*, 29-30.

(12) IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Ecclesia in Africa*, 93.

(13) IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Evangelium Vitae*, 97.

(14) EIUSDEM *Familiaris Consortio*, 17.

(15) EIUSDEM *Ecclesia in Africa*, 54.

(16) *Matth.* 5, 6.

(17) IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Ecclesia in Africa*, 106.

(18) *Gal.* 5, 13.

(19) *Lumen Gentium*, 31.(20) IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Redemptoris Missio*, 90.(21) *1Cor.* 4, 1.(22) *1Tim.* 5, 22.(23)

IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 65.(24) Cfr. *1Cor.* 1, 23-24.(25) IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Ecclesia in Africa*, 95.(26) Cfr. *1Cor.* 7, 32-34.(27) Cfr. *Luc.* 15, 3-7.(28) Cfr. *1Cor.* 4, 14.(29) Cfr. *2Tim.* 1, 6.

(30) *Eph.* 4, 24.

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